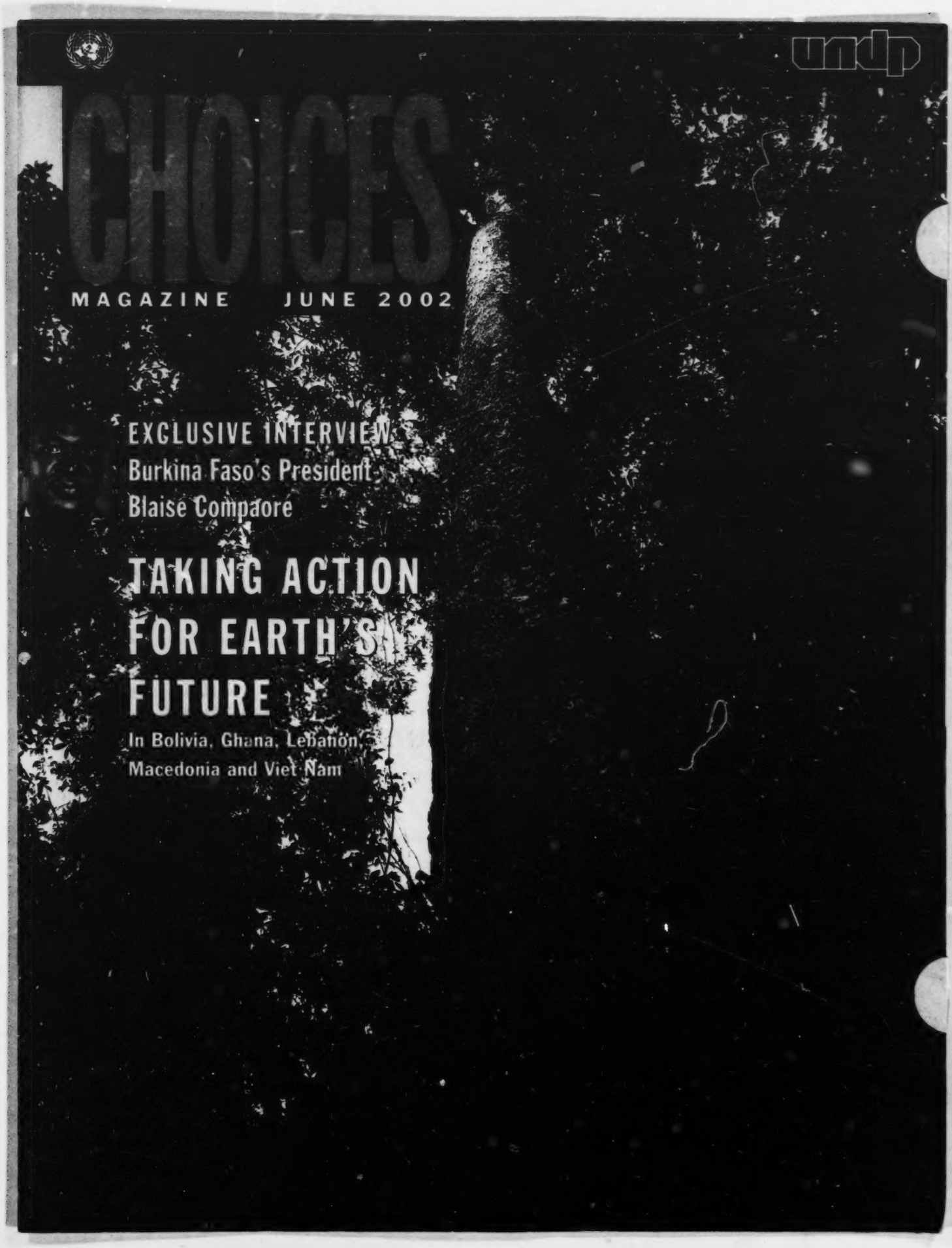

CHOICES

MAGAZINE JUNE 2002

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
Burkina Faso's President
Blaise Compaoré

TAKING ACTION FOR EARTH'S FUTURE

In Bolivia, Ghana, Lebanon,
Macedonia and Viet Nam

FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Protecting Our Common Destiny

World leaders will gather in Alberta, Canada from 26-27 June for the annual G8 Summit. On their agenda this year: strengthening global economic growth, building a new partnership for Africa's development and fighting terrorism.

The flash points and crises around the world are a constant reminder of the global village we live in. We can no longer ignore events that happen halfway across the globe.

Djibril Diallo (left) in conversation with President Wade of Senegal.

I recently returned from a conference in Dakar, Senegal where several African Heads of State and hundreds of international corporate executives gathered to discuss how best to tap economic opportunities in Africa and promote investment in the region. The conference was convened within the context of the New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD)—a made-in-Africa blueprint to provide a new direction for cooperation with developed countries and lift the continent out of poverty. Africa's leaders will formally present the implementation plan for the initiative at the G8 Summit. The goal is to seek solutions to common problems and build a network of partnerships that will be mutually beneficial to the continent and donor countries.

Among NEPAD's 10 priorities are good public governance, new information and communication technologies, good governance of the private economy, environmental protection, sustainable energy, and access to markets of developed countries. All of these concerns fall within the core thematic Practices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

For the past several years, UNDP has been building and strengthening partnerships across a broad spectrum of public and private sector organizations and institutions to tackle global problems, promote development and work towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the most prominent of which is cutting extreme poverty in half by 2015.

Ensuring environmental sustainability is also a critical MDG, with targets including reducing by 50 percent the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water, integrating sustainable development principles into country policies and programmes, and reversing the loss of environmental resources. It is an area that requires Herculean efforts in the coming years. Imagine that, today, some two billion of the world's people still lack electricity and depend on traditional cooking fuel.

Across the globe, teeming populations, burgeoning cities, unsustainable use of energy, together with natural and man-made disasters have wreaked havoc on mankind's natural habitat. UNDP is working with developing countries to integrate energy and environment policies into national development plans. During the forthcoming World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg from 26 August to 4 September, we will share our knowledge, best practices and expertise through special events, discussions and debates.

The Johannesburg Summit points to the theme of this issue of CHOICES: energy and environment. The centrepiece is an exclusive interview with President Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso, where desertification and coastal erosion pose serious problems to national development. At the same time, President Compaoré is a shining example of how enlightened leadership does make a difference even among poorest nations.

Our UNDP success stories include Bolivia's efforts in protecting rainforest biodiversity; conservation of energy and jobs creation for women in Ghana; engagement of local communities to preserve endangered habitats in Lebanon; promoting a clean and green environment in Macedonia; and the tracking of monsoons before they occur in Viet Nam. In each of these countries, we demonstrate how UNDP is working with governments to meet environmental and energy challenges for sustainable development.

Anchoring our coverage is an essay by Alvaro Umaña, Leader of UNDP's Environmentally Sustainable Development Group and former Minister of Natural Resources, Energy and Mining in Costa Rica.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has said that "all of us have to share the Earth's fragile ecosystems and precious resources, and each of us has a role to play in preserving them. If we are to go on living together on this earth, we must all be responsible for it."

With these wise words in mind, UNDP, through its global network of offices, is committed to safeguarding the planet. We will continue to work shoulder-to-shoulder with our partners to protect and nurture our common destiny—for ourselves and for our children and grandchildren.

Djibril Diallo

Cover: Noel Kempff Mercado National Park in Bolivia is an ecological treasureland. Sustainable livelihoods are supported through a UNDP project financed by the Global Environment Facility's (GEF) Small Grants Programme. Photo: David Dudenhoefer/UNDP

Coming in September

CHOICES

UNDP serves as "scorekeeper" for the UN system's Millennium Development Goals for cutting world poverty in half by 2015. A critical part of this mission is building strong partnerships in developing countries. In September, CHOICES looks at how UNDP and its partners are working together to do so.

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COMMENTARY

Goals for the New Millennium

At March's Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey, Mexico, world leaders embraced a new "Global Deal" in which political and economic reform by developing countries will be matched by greater direct support from the rich world in the form of trade, aid and investment. The European Union and the United States announced that they would increase aid by approximately US$7 billion a year and $5 billion a year respectively over the next four years. That is in the order of a 20-25 percent increase over current assistance levels, and the first significant increase in aid from both sides of the Atlantic since the 1960s. It was also a huge step politically, helping change the terms of the debate from how to spend the shrinking pool of aid on a growing number of problems, to making the most effective use of a steadily increasing resource base.

The pledges made in Monterrey remain well short of the $50 billion in additional annual aid that it is estimated is needed to meet the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). But I am confident that these new funds are only the beginning. If developing countries continue to demonstrate real results in their ongoing political and economic reform efforts, then we now have an explicit commitment from rich countries that more resources will accompany further progress.

The MDGs are not just idealistic aspirations. They are ambitious but achievable targets for making measurable improvements in the lives of the world's poorest citizens between now and 2015: putting children in schools; turning back killer diseases such as HIV/AIDS and malaria; providing access to safe drinking water. The MDGs also have unprecedented political support: two years ago, they were agreed to by all 189 countries at the Millennium Summit in New York, making the battle against poverty a collective responsibility to be undertaken by the entire world. (For more on the MDGs and how we are measuring progress towards them, visit www.undp.org/mdg.)

And, at the end of August, world leaders will gather for the United Nations World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa. Picking up where New York and Monterrey left off, the Summit will provide an opportunity for governments, citizen groups and businesses to launch result-oriented initiatives that simultaneously promotes economic growth, political and social development, and environmental protection. In Johannesburg, as at the Earth Summit in Rio 10 years ago, UNDP will focus on Capacity Development. For the past decade, UNDP has helped developing countries build a greater capacity to focus on the relationship between environmental sustainability and development.

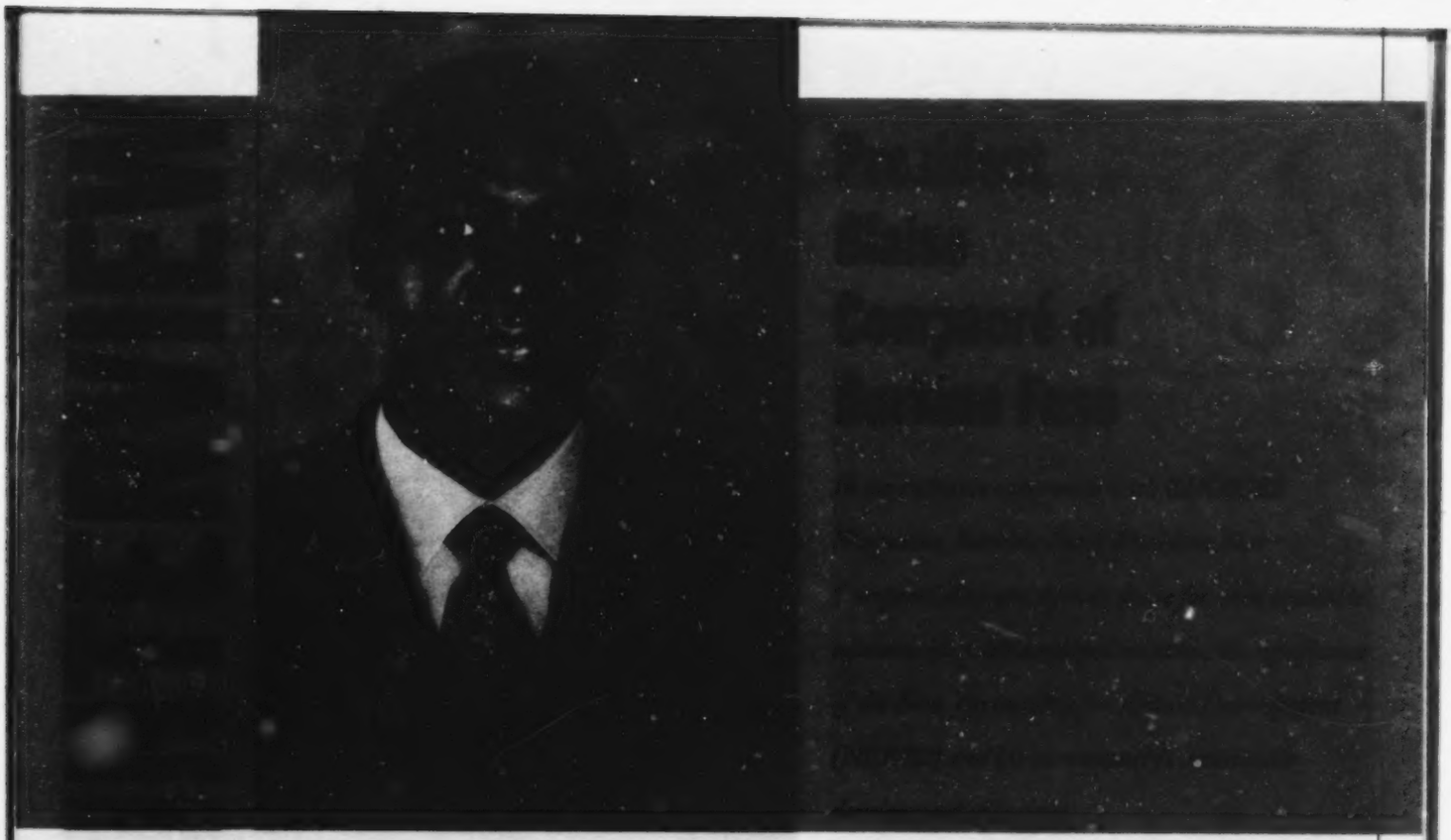
Since the poor suffer most from the degradation of their land, air, water and biological resources, we must address these critical 'poverty-environment-energy' links that will make or break our efforts to achieve sustainable development and the MDGs. This is obvious with regard to the first goal of reducing income poverty by half by 2015 since most of the rural poor depend directly on the environment and natural resources for their livelihoods—and are in need of greatly enhanced energy services to pull themselves out of poverty. Likewise, an estimated 20 percent of the death and disease of the poor is associated with environmental factors—affecting women and children in particular. To achieve our maternal and child mortality goals we must find ways to prevent the estimated 3.4 million deaths of children each year due to inadequate water supply, sanitation and hygiene, and the more than two million additional deaths due to indoor air pollution.

We are directly addressing this challenge through our Poverty and Environment Initiative which is helping countries to integrate the environmental concerns of the poor into poverty reduction strategies and policies, to identify practical measures for their implementation, and to share their experience and good practices.

Similarly, UNDP's experience in integrated development solutions gives it a unique perspective to address the multiple social, economic and environmental aspects of Sustainable Energy approaches. Today two billion people rely on traditional fuels such as wood and dung, limiting opportunities for growth. All of the MDGs depend on developing countries gaining greater access to energy services to meet the needs of the poor. So we are helping them strengthen national policy frameworks; promote clean energy technologies and rural energy services; and increase access to investment financing for sustainable energy. (For more on UNDP's support for Sustainable Energy, visit www.undp.org/seed/eap.)

In Johannesburg, we have a real opportunity to flesh out the "Global Deal" announced in New York and Monterrey: to build a global partnership of mutual self-interest aimed at achieving a safer, more prosperous, and more equitable world for all our children and their children's children. We have the benchmarks for that deal, in the Millennium Development Goals; now we must work together to reach them. ■

Mark Malloch Brown is Administrator of the United Nations Development Programme.



So much of the international community's attention has been focused in recent months on the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, and the global security issues associated with affairs in that part of the world. From your perspective, what has been the impact on Africa?

An overwhelming majority of African states have condemned the attacks that were perpetrated against the United States on 11 September 2001. In their eyes, nothing can justify such acts of terrorism. Nevertheless, their views regarding the suitability and objectives of the American response in Afghanistan have by no means been unanimous. The ensuing humanitarian crisis left many Africans with a confused impression of the war that was taking place: was it a war between the Judeo-Christian world and the Muslim world, between East and West, or between rich and poor?

How can rich nations work more effectively with Africa to help the continent break free of poverty and war?

The first point to make clear is that for us the development of Africa is primarily a matter for Africans. We are aware of the fact that we have to make a greater effort to introduce good political and economic governance, to extinguish the many smouldering tensions and to set up broad regional spaces. But the continent has already achieved considerable progress in this respect in recent years. The birth of the African Union and the creation of the New Partnership for Africa's Development show that Africans are determined more than ever before to take their destiny into their own hands.

All these efforts, however, deserve to be supported by the international community. On the political front, while the democratic ideal has made great strides on the continent, the political stability of States still remains to be secured. Most of the conflicts that are at present crippling Africa are taking place inside States, as a result of poorly managed transitions to democracy. What is needed is the support of the international community, which should accompany the continent in its drive for democratization, without being over-eager. Africa must be allowed to advance at its own pace. This is the only way the States will be able to find the stability they so badly need.

On the economic front, Africa needs an extension of resources and direct investment favouring the development of infrastructure, human resources, the environment and the minerals sector. Trade cannot bring us these resources and investments, considering that Northern markets are often highly protected and their agricultural output subsidized. This means that the continent's development will have to rely on there being greater solidarity on the part of the rich countries, in the form of dealing resolutely with the debt problem and paying a fair price for our raw materials. Meanwhile, we must be allowed enough time to learn in order to find our way into world markets, at a pace suited to the natural development of our capacities.

This duty of solidarity in favour of peace and development is a moral duty for wealthy countries, in the light of the state of deprivation of African peoples, who have to bear the tragic historical burdens of slavery and colonization.

Most of the conflicts that are at present crippling Africa are taking place inside States, as a result of poorly managed transitions to democracy.

Raising incomes is an urgent priority.

Photo: Jørgen Schytte/UNDP

Africa's health sector requires huge investments.

You participated earlier this year in Dakar, Senegal in the Conference on the Partnership with the Private Sector for Africa's Development. This meeting was organized under NEPAD's banner as a "made-in-Africa" blueprint for economic and social development. What, specifically, does NEPAD seek to accomplish?

NEPAD is trying to help Africa catch up with the developed countries. Huge investments are needed in priority sectors like good political and economic governance, infrastructure, education, health, new information and communication technologies, agriculture, the environment, energy and access to the markets of developed countries. NEPAD would like all those investments to go into regional programmes.

One of NEPAD's most original features is the role it gives to the private sector. The aim of the Dakar Financing Conference was precisely to introduce NEPAD to private operators worldwide and to encourage them to invest in the continent. In this respect, we are committed to creating an institutional and legal environment that is more secure for investments.

What is your own vision for a changed relationship between Africa and the world?

While the responsibility of Africans cannot be left aside, it is clear that slavery, colonization and the conditions of international trade constitute a heavy historical liability as far as the continent's development is concerned. While recognizing that we must be prepared to make a colossal effort ourselves, we consider that the world should stand closer to Africa. But far from wanting to remain assisted indefinitely, we would prefer in this era of globalization to establish a partnership of shared responsibility with the international community. In any case, it is impossible to imagine a stable, prosperous world in which a continent as vast and populous as Africa has been left behind.

What are the top priorities as regards Burkina Faso's sustainable development objectives?

We have prepared a "*Letter of intent for a policy of sustainable human development,*" in which we state our determination to increase

This continent is far from having exhausted its potential for progress; it is crammed with human and material resources which are still underutilized.

President Compaoré visits a UNDP project.

Photo: UNDP Burkina Faso

The key to Africa's future.

Photo: Jørgen Schytte/UNDP

our national output and considerably reduce poverty. Our strategy is focused on people not only as actors but also as beneficiaries. We have set out our priorities as follows:

- To increase rural income;
- To support the growth of existing income sources such as agriculture and stockbreeding;
- To re-centre the role of the State on regulating the economy;
- To promote good governance by strengthening democracy;
- To take account of the regional integration dimension in the struggle against poverty.

In concrete terms, the social sectors—education, health and employment—have for some years already been accounting for a third of the national budget.

Are you optimistic about Africa's future, and, if so, why?

The answer is yes. This continent is far from having exhausted its potential for progress; it is crammed with human and material resources which are still underutilized. Furthermore, a form of leadership is beginning to emerge in matters related to development management. Good examples of this are the establishment of the African Union and the creation of NEPAD. We are on the right track. There only remains for the international community to become aware of the need to give us more determined support, especially by dealing firmly with matters which are of fundamental importance for African economies, such as the debt burden and access to northern markets.

The spotlight will again be on Africa later this year when the World Summit on Sustainable Development is held in Johannesburg. What are your expectations for the Summit?

Since the Rio Summit in 1992, nothing very much has changed, whether in terms of the environment, public development aid or trade. I would therefore like the wealthy countries to undertake more concrete commitments in Johannesburg. ■

Contributor: Theophane Kinda, the Communications Officer in UNDP Burkina Faso.

Generating Capacity for Sustainable Development: Lessons and Challenges

BY ALVARO UMAÑA

The challenge of our age is to learn to use globalization as a tool to generate more equitable and sustainable growth.

The road from Rio

In 1992, 185 nations gathered in Rio de Janeiro for the Earth Summit to endorse Agenda 21, a blueprint for a more equitable and sustainable society. The world has changed since then. The end of the Cold War led to a dramatic increase in flows of private capital and information worldwide. The information and telecommunication revolutions helped create a more interconnected and interdependent world where the dominant factors are international trade, private investment and financing—all of which have been growing faster than national economies.

This phenomenon, commonly referred to as *globalization*, has become a dominant socio-economic force, affecting every corner of the planet.

Globalization is generating new wealth and rapid technological improvements, and should therefore offer an unparalleled opportunity to advance sustainable human development. Yet so far it has had a largely negative impact on the poor, further marginalizing the four-fifths of humanity that must survive precariously on only 20 percent of global production. At the same time, developing countries bear a heavy burden of external debt which impedes their development.

Globalization brings new challenges and risks, as well as creates new opportunities. The challenge of our age is to learn to use globalization as a tool to generate more equitable and sustainable growth. The poor must be afforded an opportunity to benefit from the global economy. This requires heightened linkages—both within governments and across the public and private sectors. Economics Nobel Laureate Joseph Stiglitz summed it up neatly: *Scan globally, reinvent locally.*

In evaluating our progress since Rio, we must reexamine Agenda 21 and the Rio Accords against the wider backdrop of globalization. Underpinning Agenda 21 was a global compact that official development assistance (ODA) would double and be devoted exclusively to sustainable development. Instead, ODA levels shrank by one-third. Current levels of ODA measured as a percentage of Gross National Product presently stand at 0.22 percent, down from 0.35 percent a decade ago, and far short of the 0.7 percent that developed countries had promised to meet. According to James Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank, the difference between those targets and present levels represents US$100 billion per year that is not flowing to developing countries.

On the positive side, we have witnessed unprecedented international efforts to implement Agenda 21 in the past decade. Most countries have created specialized institutions to deal with environment, energy and sustainable development; more than 80 have established national commissions or councils for sustainable development. At the local level, over 6,200 cities, communities or municipalities have developed local Agendas 21 involving millions of citizens.

The road to Johannesburg and beyond

In preparation for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) to be held in Johannesburg (26 August to 4 September 2002), over 130 countries are working with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to follow up on the Rio commitments. Yet overall progress towards sustainability has been slow.

The UN Secretary-General's report on Agenda 21 points to a critical implementation gap—one that has multiple roots, including piecemeal approaches, lack of appropriate tools to make the concept operational or measure progress towards it, and inadequate financial resources and human capacity. Very few countries have so far been able to integrate sustainability into their development strategies. Fragmented, sectoral approaches to development still prevail and integration of the social, economic —including trade and investment—and environmental components has proven elusive. In short, most countries experienced difficulty in moving from the *concept* to the *practice* of sustainable development.

Weaknesses in governance systems at all levels represent the pivotal challenge to achieving sustainable development. To overcome this, we need practical, effective systems of governance for sustainable development: globally, regionally, nationally and locally. We need adequate and sustainable funding. We need global and regional mechanisms that can deal in an integrated fashion with the economic, social and environmental dimensions of development in our rapidly globalizing world.

Many international organizations and agreements are still highly compartmentalized, competing rather than cooperating among themselves. Since they lack a common perspective on key sustainable development challenges, they have often failed to help their partners in developing countries achieve the synergies among social, economic, and environmental initiatives that are crucial if we are to make real progress towards a sustainable future.

Nationally, we have seen the emergence of many different models of governance embrace sustainable development, including national councils or commissions for sustainable development. The best have been carefully adapted to the unique conditions of their countries. While the creation of these bodies has been a necessary first step, national implementation of Agenda 21 largely remains limited and tentative.

The most innovative and promising responses to Agenda 21 are to be found at the local level, where thousands of successful projects illustrate what sustainable development is about. Local Agendas 21 and UNDP programmes such as Capacity 21, Local Initiative Facility for Urban Environment (LIFE) and the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Small Grants Programme exemplify holistic local sustainable development strategies. Drawing upon the creative energy of people in many sectors, and from different walks of life, these initiatives have helped re-conceptualize a 'bottom-up' model for sustainable development that recognizes the linkages between local, national, regional and global settings.

UNDP's mandate

UNDP has a clear global mandate to take the lead in supporting our partners in developing countries and countries in transition to build their capacities to implement Agenda 21. This mandate was reaffirmed in the Secretary-General's recent report to the WSSD Second Preparatory Committee meeting.

Strategically, UNDP is focusing more closely on supporting *capacity development for good governance*, a strategic niche that offers the possibility for catalytic changes in the way decisions are made and acted upon in a long-term and sustainable manner. As an organization we have 10 years' experience helping countries build capacity to manage sustainable development in response to their expressed priorities. We are proud of our performance in delivering on this mandate, and we are prepared to expand our delivery capacity so as to make sustainable development an achievable goal.

Special attention should be given to ways in which countries can link their national strategies to the mandates of the global environmental agreements. Our efforts must be based on a sound assessment of country needs and demands, respecting local priorities, cultural traditions and institutional arrangements.

As a means to support sustainable development UNDP has prioritized "energy and environment" as one of our six Practices. In our country-level operations we are working in these areas in over 80 percent of all national programmes of development cooperation, including the Montreal Protocol and the GEF. This is one of the largest areas of development assistance for UNDP worldwide.

The nature of present global problems and actors calls for a partnership that goes beyond traditional lines of governmental versus non-governmental, or public versus private. It must genuinely involve a wide variety of stakeholders as partners in a new venture for sustainability. WSSD offers a unique and timely opportunity for a global examination of the successes and failures since Rio. We need focused attention on a global scale to bring together new and meaningful partnerships that can leapfrog us into the 21st Century.

In designing these partnerships we are guided by the Millennium Development Goals. These goals help us focus on the critical need to reduce poverty and draw attention to the strategic importance of healthy governance structures for sustainable development as reflected in the call for national strategies for sustainable development by 2005 and for the reversal of the deterioration of both local and global environmental resources by 2015.

We do not need to 're-vision' Agenda 21 in Johannesburg. As a global community, we must focus on concrete actions that promote widespread and sustainable change. Poverty eradication, good governance and effective partnerships lie at the heart of this implementation strategy, and UNDP is committed to working with all our partners, in Johannesburg and beyond, toward a equitable and sustainable world. ■

Alvaro Umaña is Leader of UNDP's Environmentally Sustainable Development Group.

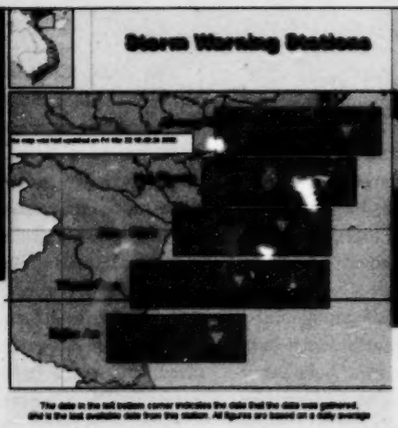
VIET NAM

TAKING ACTION FOR EARTH'S FUTURE

BY TRAN LE THUY

Weathering the Storms in Viet Nam

Knowledge of the fisherman's way of life starts early in Hau Loc.



Photos: Tran Viet Duc/UNDP

State-of-the-art weather forecasting in Viet Nam is preventing tragedies at sea.

HAU LOC, VIET NAM

Hoang Minh Tram recalls the mourners with their traditional white headbands as they lined the seashore here after a devastating tropical storm in 1996. The now 47-year-old fishing boat captain narrowly escaped the calamity in his village in the central province of Thanh Hoa, about 170 kilometres south of the capital, Hanoi.

"The radio alert came four hours late," he explains.

"It would not have happened now," says Trinh Nhat Thuy, Vice Director of Thanh Hoa's Provincial Committee for Flood and Storm Control. "Since 2000, we have been able to get early warnings and now know about a storm 10 days before it arrives." Viewing a regional weather forecast satellite picture, he follows the track of a tempest heading west towards Viet Nam from the Philippines, while downloading information from the Web site www.undp.org.vn/dmu.

Thanks to this link, he and colleagues across the country receive forecasts from Viet Nam's hydro-metereological service, via the joint Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development and United Nations Development Programme Disaster Management Unit (UNDP/DMU). The connection enables the country's Central Committee for Flood and Storm Control to deliver storm alerts and emergency orders within seconds—not days—as used to be the case. Well-equipped with emergency backup power supplies, mobile communications and computers provided by the DMU, "we can keep in touch with the central office in almost any severe situation," says Mr. Thuy.

Back aboard his boat in Hau Loc, Mr. Tram turns on a small radio that he keeps next to a prayer altar filled with red incense sticks. "My wife and children, my fishing, nothing stops me from tuning in to the weather forecast on the radio every morning at 6:30 sharp," he says.

Fighting disasters means fighting poverty

On average, about five to seven typhoons strike Viet Nam each year, raising sea levels many metres and sending storm surges up rivers. Already swollen by monsoon rains, the rivers flood surrounding areas, devastating property, infrastructure and food-crops. Among the worst storms in recent years was Typhoon Linda in 1997, which took 3,000 lives along Viet Nam's southern coast. In 1999, floods in the central provinces claimed another 800 people and caused US$350 million in damage. During the past two years, hundreds more people, mostly children, have been killed in Mekong River Delta floods that also caused more than $500 million damage.

When it comes to weather prediction, "using traditional methods, like reading cloud colours or noting wind direction is no longer effective because the weather has changed," says Mr. Tram, alluding to shifting climatic conditions that he and fellow fishermen have observed in recent years.

"If a boat sinks out there, a family will lose everything," says Nguyen Dinh Thi, 76.

"If a boat sinks out there, a family will lose everything," adds Nguyen Dinh Thi, 76, as he sits on the village's shore looking out on a quiet sea. His son has gone fishing for a month. "Boats are all the fortune we have and the fishermen are a family's main source of labour," he says. Mr. Thi, like so many fishermen, knows well how easy it can be to slip into poverty, how poverty and natural disaster are so closely linked. Thanh Hoa Province was once infamous throughout Viet Nam for having so many poor people begging after the annual storm season.

It is against this background that UN efforts in Viet Nam shifted from recording and reacting to natural disasters, to focusing on preparedness and mitigation. Through their $4.7 million programme, the DMU, the government and UNDP meld together 21st century technologies with a more than 1,000-year-old Vietnamese flood protection culture. (Viet Nam has a system of more than 8,000 kilometres of river, sea and estuary dykes. These are essential for protection of the country's infrastructure and rice farming.)

Marshall Silver is UNDP's senior technical adviser to the DMU's Support to Disaster Management System. "We are working with radio and TV to improve weather forecasting programmes," he says. One project initiative involves helping to design computer-graphic weather and disaster warning systems for Viet Nam Television. News editors are also being trained in how best to disseminate disaster warnings to the general public. The project's extensive computer-based information system links flood and storm centres in all 61 of Viet Nam's provinces.

"One of the reasons for Viet Nam to be considered a world leader in disaster management is because the authorities are very committed," says Mr. Silver. "Viet Nam is one of the few places that has very strong coordination between government and international donors in disaster mitigation and management."

The partnership led by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, UNDP and the Netherlands provides a broad framework for well-coordinated action to limit losses due to disasters. It is "an important mechanism for mobilizing both domestic and external resources," says Jordan Ryan, UNDP's Resident Representative in Viet Nam. Priority is being given to a package of 21 projects focused on the seven most flood-afflicted of the central provinces.

Dang Quang Tinh is Director of the Central Committee for Flood and Storm Control, in Hanoi. He surfs the DMU Web site daily, watching for early alerts from international news agencies, US Government storm and typhoon warning centres, and regional and local weather reports. "We are on duty 24 hours a day during the disaster season," he says. Mr. Tinh is proud that his early warning to provincial authorities last year ensured that people were evacuated from vulnerable homes and boats during a massive typhoon that struck central Viet Nam. Although damage was widespread, "counting one person for each boat and house, we could have lost thousands of lives instead of 23," he says.

Satellite image used for storm tracking.

"This UNDP project succeeds because it combines strong government leadership with modern technology, committed international support and plain hard work in the fight against disasters. At the same time, we are attacking poverty by making sure disasters don't push people deeper into a cycle of despair," says Mr. Ryan. "It is clear that Viet Nam's success can provide useful lessons for other countries vulnerable to disasters." ■

Centre: Ever vigilant for evidence of trouble.

Above: At harbour in Hau Loc.

Tran Le Thuy is a reporter with the Saigon Times *in Hanoi.*

BY REEM HADDAD

Safeguarding Biodiversity, Strengthening Communities in Lebanon

BEIRUT, LEBANON

This is a country that has often been described as the parkland of the Middle East. But while rich in biodiversity, Lebanon's majestic mountains along with its scenic valleys, plateaus and coastal areas have suffered immensely in recent decades through neglect. A 16-year civil war (1975-1990) and other periods of instability caused the environment to be a low priority and have contributed greatly to the degradation of precious ecosystems across the land, while causing economic hardship for many people.

As a result of such pressures, efforts to reverse these adverse trends have sometimes resulted in fierce resistance from those most closely affected. But there have also been miraculous turnabouts. Take the case of Issam Sidawi, an avid fisherman and hunter from Tripoli, on Lebanon's Mediterranean coast, just south of Syria. Mr. Sidawi was outraged when, in 1992, the Government of Lebanon declared some of his favourite haunts—the Palm Islands, a short boat ride from Tripoli—to be an ecological reserve, where not even picnicking was allowed any more along its sandy shores.

For years, Mr. Sidawi led protests and gathered petitions to demand that local inhabitants' traditional right to enjoy the islands' pleasures and treasures be restored. Today, however, he is a park ranger for the Palm Islands—one of three biologically diverse jewels whose ecology is being protected through a US$2.5 million programme funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF). The initiative is being managed by the United Nations Development Programme and executed by Lebanon's Ministry of Environment, with technical assistance from the International Union

Below: Forest reserve manager Assad Serhal. Gaining community support was tough but rewarding.

Photo: Roger Moukarzel/UNDP

Left and above: Natural products from the cedar forests boost local incomes.

Left and above: Plotting progress and considering it in the field.

for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN). A local non-governmental organization (NGO), the Environment Protection Committee (EPC) has proved an instrumental partner in convincing local citizens of the validity of protecting the Palm Islands, whose 450 hectares, altogether, belies their ecological significance.

The task of winning local acceptance was no easy one, according to Ghassan Jaradi, manager of the Palm Islands eco-reserve. "The communities here were already so bitter about it being off-limits to them," he says. But banning visitors for a time was an unavoidable necessity, it turns out. During the civil war the islands were taken over by militias. In 1984—Palm Island, largest of the group—was set afire. At war's end, more than 6,000 unexploded artillery shells were also discovered there, many of them buried under the sand. It was only in 2001, after an extensive effort by the Lebanese Army to remove this ordnance, that the island was finally declared safe.

Earning grassroots support

Meanwhile, with peace at hand, migratory and other bird species that disappeared during the war years had been returning. At least 157 species (among them 42 migratory species had been observed as of earlier this year. Visitors are once again allowed onto the islands during summer months, although beaches that serve as breeding grounds for rare and endangered Loggerhead and Green turtles, and the globally endangered Mediterranean Monk Seal, remain off-limits. Engaging local residents from the adjacent Lebanese mainland to serve as guardians and advocates of these endeavours has been essential, Mr. Jaradi points out. As he puts it: "Awareness is 99 percent and the law is one percent. The most important thing is to change people's behaviour."

A similar story is found to unfold half way across the country in another pressurized ecosystem, the central portion of the Mount Lebanon mountain chain, where other communities are also proving vigilant when it comes to protecting natural riches close by their villages. Here amid peaks parallel to the Mediterranean Sea that range between 1,200 and 2,000 metres high, the slopes are dressed with breath-taking cedar forests where wolves and wild boars still roam.

As in the case of wildlife in the Palm Islands the local population here was resentful at first about the prospect of non-traditional management of their most prized resources—in this case the cedar forests. (Nationwide, these cover about five percent of the land.) But a local NGO, the Shouf Cedar Society, had a strategy to engage the public through making the forest, which had been declared a legally protected area in 1996, into ground for a profitable venture.

"For the first two years, our strategy was just protection of the area, and not eco-tourism," says Karim Alameddine, the Society's vice-president.

But in 1999 the Society launched its Rural Development Project aimed at generating income from the Shouf reserve. "We had to overcome the (local) attitude against us," says Assad Serhal, the reserve's manager. "We didn't want to be an island; we wanted people to feel that they were benefitting." The Society purchases home-made products made by local women from their harvesting of the forest's bounty—including bottled flower water, jams and honey—and markets these goods to tourists.

By last year, more than 50 families were involved in this project. Among them is Zahia Amatouri, a 51-year-old mother of three whose construction worker husband is unemployed in winter and earns only a small income during other months. "It just wasn't enough," says Mrs. Amatouri. "We have school tuition to pay." The additional money from their home business operation enables them to make ends meet now, she adds.

Building ecological awareness

Another forest reserve, Horsh Ehden, in northern Lebanon, also experienced initial resistance from local citizens who had traditionally hunted and harvested the forest and used it to hold their livestock until it was declared a protected area in 1992. But even the Friends of Horsh Ehden Reserve, the local NGO, has been amazed by the importance of the 11 square kilometres members had lobbied to protect. Within the reserve's boundaries are 1,058 plant species of which about one-fifth are regarded as rare. Among them are 78 species of medicinal plants.

The Horsh Ehden reserve is also yielding other bounty. It is the last remaining forest for the indigenous wild apple of Lebanon and is proving to be a gene pool for other species, as ecologists look ahead to future reforestation projects.

"We have original seeds here," says Sandra Saba, the reserve's assistant manager. "They are more resistant to disease and are genetically intact. So if we ever need to reforest an area we can take the pure seeds from here."

Slowly at first but in an increasingly steady way, as people have struggled to overcome the hardships of their everyday lives, they have been demonstrating to others and—most importantly—to themselves that regard for the environment makes sense. Or, put another way, that conserving biodiversity is an integral part of sustainable human development. ■

Reem Haddad is a freelance journalist in Beirut. She writes for Lebanon's Daily Star *newspaper, the* New Internationalist *and other publications.*

Rare species abound in Lebanon's forest reserves.

Above: Wildflowers of the Horsh Ehden reserve.

Right: Northern Lebanon's uplands contain rich and intact gene pools.

Photos: R. Hale/MOE/UNDP

GHANA

TAKING ACTION FOR EARTH'S FUTURE

STORY AND PHOTOS BY A. H

Generating Opportunities for Women in Ghana

Left: Locally-manufactured equipment has shaved hours off these women's workday. Above: The ripened fruit of shea nuts is sweet and buttery. Right: The face of progress in Gbimsi.

Above: Historically, shea nuts have been exported from Africa whole, then processed by chocolate makers in developed countries.

Gbimsi, Ghana

Like most rural places in Africa whose economic mainstay is subsistence farming, the West Mamprusi district of northern Ghana is one where the lack of reliable and readily available energy services has a particularly harsh impact on women's lives.

Rural electrification is progressing in the country but remains a distant dream for many. With assistance from the European Development Fund, Ghanaian authorities are creating a national electrification programme but they do not expect to complete it until 2020. Meanwhile, Ghana is also pursuing renewable energy projects. Among them is a solar-powered, rural "off-grid" project funded by the Government of Ghana, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United States Department of Energy's National Renewable Energy Laboratory. It's aim is to demonstrate the economic viability and sustainability of non-traditional energy services to rural communities.

Other kinds of alternative energy systems and labour-saving technologies that women can manage and benefit from are proving critical to the development of sustainable rural industries. Women's work accounts for 70 percent of Africa's food security, according to the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), a fund administered by UNDP. In remote Ghanaian villages like Gbimsi, home to about 5,000 people 750 kilometres north of the capital, Accra, the major source of income is the processing of nuts from shea trees, whose "butter" is highly prized by the international cosmetics, chocolate and pharmaceutical industries.

In Gbimsi, manufacturing this product is the community's economic lifeline. But there is a steep price attached to customary methods of extracting and refining shea butter harvested from the hardy fruit trees that grow wild across the Guinea Savannah woodlands of this region. Such work has traditionally involved women enduring long days of hazardous exposure to smoke, flames and fumes from boiling oil as they labour in close quarters, grinding, kneading, and cooking the contents of the shea tree kernels. Adding socio-economic injury to physical risk, women have been—by custom—almost completely shut out of male-dominated entrepreneurial circles responsible for marketing the goods they produce. In the end, while making shea butter is very much a rural woman's affair, the primary workers are by and large a distressed lot whose efforts in most cases never raise them above a bare subsistence level of existence.

The shea tree is found throughout the semi-arid Sahel area of West Africa. In some dialects of the region it's name means "life."

Thanks to an initial UNIFEM grant of US$40,000, the shea butter women of Gbimsi—none of whom had ever handled any machinery before—have been organized into a 40-member cooperative association. Villagers say it was previously unthinkable for a woman to take charge of a grinding mill, the heartbeat of many Ghanaian villages, for anything to do with machines was considered the preserve of men. The cooperative's members manage their own cash flow and basic maintenance of their machines. UNIFEM advances them loans through GRESDA.

The president of the cooperative, the Gbimsi Shea Butter Extraction Group, is Chimsi Tia. "We are all aware that we have to use the capital given us judiciously, and so we are all paying on a monthly basis," she says. Already, within the relatively short period of time the project has been in place, her fellow workers have been able to supplement their husbands' incomes.

"Now, we are even able to pay school fees for our children and not have to wait for our husbands to provide the cash," Mrs. Tia adds. "In the dry season, when there is not much for our husbands to do, we fill in."

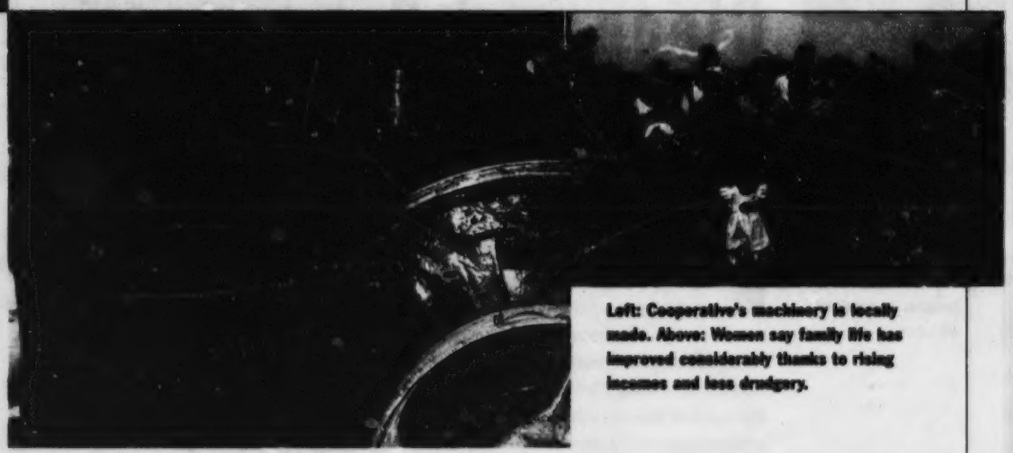
In Tamale, the capital of Ghana's northern region, TechnoServe's business adviser to the Gbimsi project is Joseph Bangnikon. He says his company is optimistic about the project's future, and the potential for it being replicated elsewhere. Meanwhile, "we are helping in the marketing, and have linked (the cooperative) to a few buying companies in Accra." Some such firms there, including a natural cosmetics company, have recently been paying the cooperative "premium" prices for their shea butter, Mr. Bangnikon adds.

"The exciting thing about the project is that the women were involved in a dialogue, reviewing the time they used to spend in the production process and what they are spending now that the machines are working efficiently," says Florence Butegwa, UNIFEM Regional Programme Director for Anglophone West Africa. "This is a project about them looking at economic efficiency as an entry point for the empowerment of women."

Ms. Butegwa adds, "What started off as a factory, in essence, or a renewable energy project, is becoming a prototype of what development should be if it is people-centred."

According to GRESDA project management statistics, the women of the Gbimsi cooperative are able to produce at least one tonne of shea butter per month. With the earnings this brings, thatch roofs of houses are being replaced with aluminium sheeting; women also have more time at home to spend on educating their children. Saving time on looking for firewood, they are turning their attention to other activities and, in a boon to collective self-esteem, keen to become literate. The British-based non-governmental organization ActionAid's Ghana unit is introducing a literacy programme, on the heels of the UNIFEM-led initiative in Gbimsi. ■

A. Harruna Attah is editor of the Accra Daily Mail.



Left: Cooperative's machinery is locally made. Above: Women say family life has improved considerably thanks to rising incomes and less drudgery.

It was into this divide that UNIFEM stepped in 1998 as part of a broader UNDP commitment in West Africa to address energy issues related to sustainable development bottlenecks. The Gender-Responsive Renewable Energy Systems Development and Application (GRESDA) programme is one that immediately identified shea butter production as a priority concern in both Ghana and Nigeria, says Sabina Anokye Mensah, National Coordinator for GRESDA-Ghana.

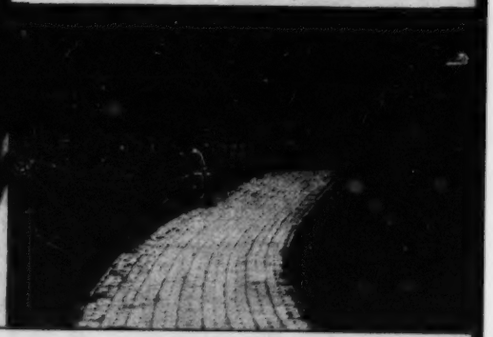
Appropriate technology has been key

"Before the intervention of GRESDA and UNIFEM, the women had to walk long distances to collect firewood and pick shea nuts. The project has provided a grinding mill and oil extractors together with some seed capital, which the women handle themselves," says Ms. Mensah. The introduction of locally-manufactured machinery has slashed three hours from the women's typical workday. The devices are powered by diesel engine. The use of firewood has been slashed by 80 percent—an important consideration in a degrading environment where "slash and burn" farming has contributed greatly to the denuding of a landscape that in the dry season takes on a semi-desertlike appearance.

"The shea butter project has started off well and it has a bright future," says Ms. Mensah. "Now, with assistance from development partner TechnoServe Ghana, we have linked the women with potential buyers," she adds.

Photo: Robert Atanasovsky/UNDP

Below: The old made new again: Grounds of ancient fortress above Skopje are now a popular park.

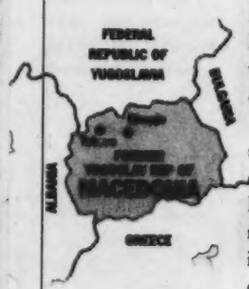


Right and centre: The greening of river banks has been a source of civic pride, as random dump-sites have disappeared.

Jobs funded by the Clean and Green programme have eased life for many families in economic distress.

Clean and Green in Macedonia

BY EDITH JOHNSON



TETOVO, FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

In the winter and spring of 1999, just as this country was beginning to emerge from a painful period of economic and political transition, a massive influx of refugees fleeing conflict in neighbouring Kosovo reached crisis proportions. By April of that year as many as 320,000 refugees—equal to about 15 percent of Macedonia's own population—had arrived, with half of them being hosted in the homes of fellow ethnic Albanians.

Tetovo, the country's second-largest city, saw its richly diverse population of 50,000 ethnic Albanians, Macedonians, Turks and Romanies more than double as the Kosovar refugees kept pouring in. Facing mounting social tensions in a community (and country) already suffering from acute unemployment, local authorities here in the centre of the fertile and densely populated Polog Valley had to cope with severe strains on water supply and sanitation systems that were causing environmental harm and threatening to pose a serious health hazard.

"At the time, we had few collaborative relationships with international organizations, who often bypassed local authorities, and delivered humanitarian assistance directly to the refugees," says Tetovo's mayor, Murtezan Ismaili.

Tetovo was not alone. In an effort to assist the Government of Macedonia's efforts to mitigate the economic and social crises facing communities across the country, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) launched a project called *Clean and Green Macedonia.* By recruiting unskilled workers to clean and dispose of waste in the most vulnerable municipalities, including the capital, Skopje, income from much-needed short-term jobs eased life for many families in economic distress. But because of its high profile and national scope the programme has also succeeded in raising general public awareness of environmental issues as part of a national campaign to that end.

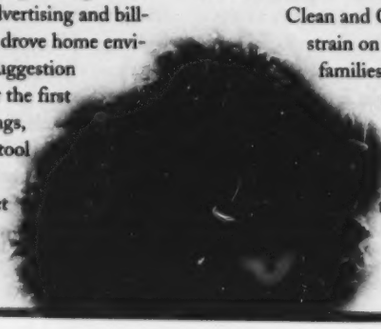
In the first phase of Clean and Green in 1999, with its concentration on Skopje and Tetovo, public spaces enjoyed by a million people—half of Macedonia's population—were improved. By 2001, more than 100 municipalities in the country had participated in the programme, as national television coverage, along with local print and radio advertising and billboards across the land, drove home environmental messages. Suggestion boxes were placed—for the first time—in public buildings, including schools, as a tool for helping authorities determine sites to target for cleanup drives.

"It also enabled municipalities to restore basic services and to address environmental degradation by removing illegal dump sites. UNDP considered us to be an active partner, so the municipality was entrusted with identifying priority activities, managing recruitment and procurement, and reporting on the projects," Mr. Ismaili adds.

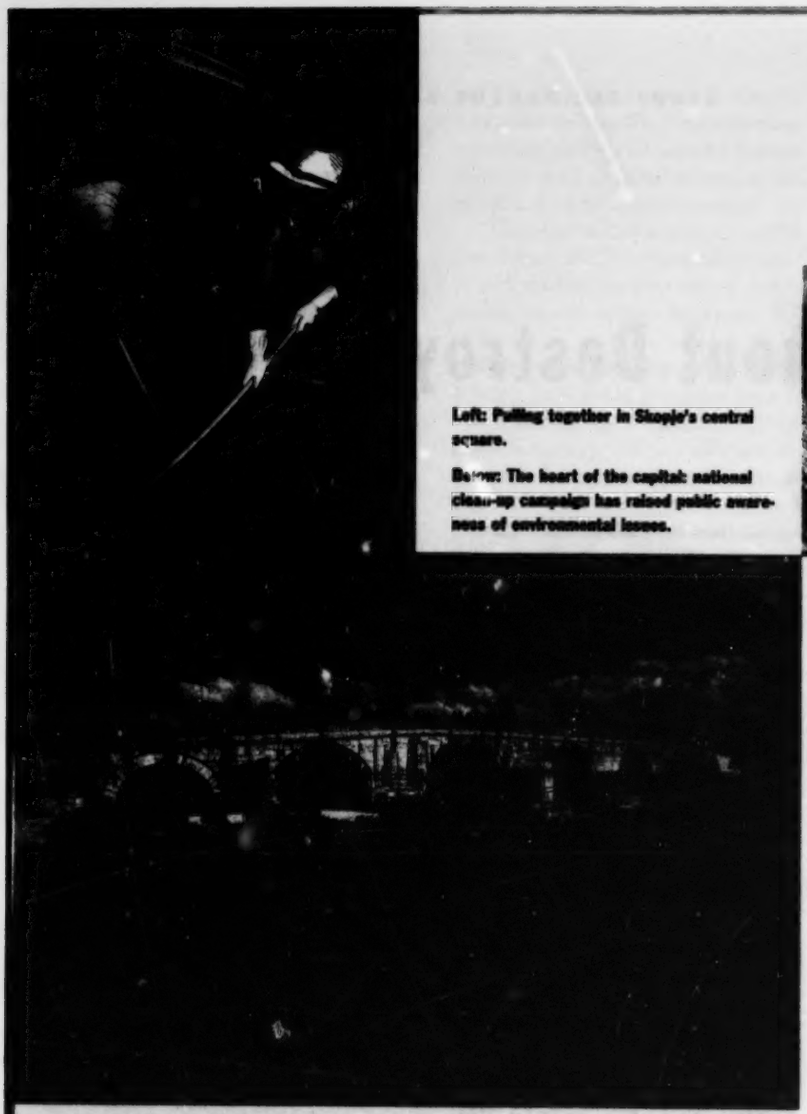
Photo: Rongalics Vidor/UNDP

Relieving strain during Kosovo crisis

That sort of institutional capacity-building is a long way from the daily reality of Iso Bekteshov's life. Mr. Bekteshov and his children were among some 60,000 families in Macedonia who were receiving small state welfare payments (the equivalent in his case of about US$39 a month) at the time Clean and Green was introduced in his municipality of Karposh. "I've been unemployed for 10 years. I worked odd jobs here and there, to support the whole family," he explains, adding that through his work for the UNDP project he earned $100 a month.



Clean and Green has eased the strain on more than 2,000 families since 1999, in many cases offering much-needed temporary relief to rural households that are engaged primarily in sub-



Left: Pulling together in Skopje's central square.

Below: The heart of the capital: national clean-up campaign has raised public awareness of environmental issues.

Old appliances and abandoned cars have been removed from the country's rivers.

sistence farming. But in terms of lasting impact, it is the effect on local government project partners that keeps coming up.

Stefche Jakimovski is Karposh's mayor. He says he thought differently about his responsibilities after implementing a project in his community. "When we finished in December 2000, we decided to continue; UNDP encouraged me to think far more about the cleaning of my municipality. Now we have 40 people who are employed continuously, and regular truck serivce for hauling waste."

The most recent offshoot of Clean and Green has been a cooperative venture between UNDP and the United States Agency for International Development to deal with damage in local communities caused by civil warfare in Macedonia. Intense fighting erupted in February 2001 and lasted for several months. Based on the successful methods and relationships developed amid the refugee crisis of 1999 and after, the latest project provides matching grants to municipalities so that they can mobilize resources for infrastructure repairs. The approach also now serves as a model for municipal capacity-building efforts across the border in Albania.

Today, Macedonia continues to face great challenges, environmental and otherwise. "Clean and Green helps with those challenges through its strategy of focusing on the dual goals of solid-waste management and short-term job creation, says UNDP Project Officer Zoran Narashanov. Unemployed people, especially those located outside the capital, have benefitted from regular paying work. Mayors and their staffs have supported the programme because they have been able to show their constituencies the programme's effectiveness, and perhaps their own, as administrators. The public has seen random dumpsites on public lands replaced by the greening of those spaces.

Economic and other benefits from Clean and Green and related programmes have been immediate and visible, while local authorities in communities across Macedonia have gained much previously unobtainable experience. Until a few years ago, the country had only 20 municipalities; under a 1996 redistricting law, there are now 124 of them. Moreover, when the programme was launched in 1999, municipal powers were severely restricted by a highly centralized national budgetary system that saw local governments having to apply for funds for such specific purposes as public sanitation and street repair.

Devolution of greater authority to the municipal level, including for environmental management, is set to continue as a result of a Law on Local Self-Government approved in January 2002 by Parliament. UNDP is poised to provide more advanced management skills for municipalities as they go forward to face their new and broader responsibilities.

Meanwhile, in Tetovo, where once the river that runs through it had its shores lined with ghastly piles of refuse and plastics, car parts and washing machines, all is changed. Even during the civil conflict that occurred in 2001 the civic clean-up efforts were maintained.

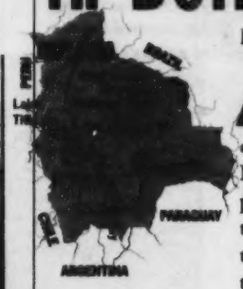
And the people of Tetovo continue to take pride in their public spaces—theirs to enjoy. ■

Edith Johnson is a freelance journalist and civil society adviser based in Skopje.

TAKING ACTION FOR OUR FUTURE

STORY AND PHOTOS BY DAVID DUDENHOEFER

Selling Nature without Destroying It in Bolivia



LA FLORIDA, BOLIVIA

As 19-year-old nature guide Manuel Arias leads a group of visitors through the rain forest of eastern Bolivia's Noel Kempff Mercado National Park, identifying rare birds and pointing out useful plants, he embodies a trend that has been lauded by conservationists and development workers alike—the growth of community ecotourism.

Mr. Arias is one of seven men from the Chiquitano Indian village of La Florida—a collection of thatched roof, adobe houses across the Paraguá River from the park—who completed a guide-training course last year. The graduates also received hiking and camping equipment through a credit fund, which they will repay using the US$10 daily fee they charge tourists. The training and loan fund are components of an ecotourism project supported by the Global Environment Facility/Small Grants Programme (SGP), implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The project, financed with a $24,000 grant from SGP in 2000, is attempting to draw more visitors to the remote park while improving the ability of local people to accommodate them.

Mr. Arias explains that guiding not only pays better than his former job working in a sawmill; he also prefers it. His sentiments reflect an important change within La Florida, which has long had a predatory relationship with its natural resources. During the 1970s and 1980s the local economy was based on logging and hunting; countless tons of mahogany and tens of thousands of jaguar, ocelot and other animal hides were exported from the area before the establishment of the national park. A few of Mr. Arias' neighbours still work in logging, but he says most are switching to tourism.

"It's a good alternative, selling nature without destroying nature," says Mr. Arias.

The nature that La Florida's residents want to "sell" lies within Noel Kempff Mercado—15,234 square kilometres of rain forest, savannah and other ecosystems spread along Bolivia's border with Brazil. The park, with its more than 4,000 plant species, protects such endangered animals as the jaguar, tapir, rhea and giant anteater, and is home to 630 bird species—about three-quarters as many as are found in all of North America. According to biologist Tim Killeen, a research fellow at Conservation International's Centre for Applied Biodiversity, Noel Kempff Mercado is one of Latin America's most important protected areas. "It is extraordinarily diverse," he says.

Towards a better future

Mr. Killeen is one of the designers of the ecotourism project, which is administered by the Fundación Amigos del Museo de Historia Natural Noel Kempff Mercado, a university-based non-governmental organization dedicated to research and conservation. In addition to training guides, the Fundación has helped the community form an Ecotourism Association, which both assists visitors and coordinates efforts by local people to make money from tourism. An essential part of the project is an SGP-financed rotating credit fund that has helped families build rustic accommodations, equip small restaurants, and buy bicycles and dugout canoes to rent to tourists. The aim is to give visitors more options and thereby encourage longer stays. The Fundación is also working with the park's administrators to expand and improve its trails, which include a mountain bike track leading to a lake called Laguna Chaplin, a focal point for scientists studying the biological dynamics of the southern Amazonian rain forest.

Juan Surubí, who acquired five bicycles to rent through the credit fund, is enthused about tourism's potential. "It is a source of work that is going to carry us forward, toward a better future," he says with a smile.

While improving the community's abil-

Above and right: Extraordinary beauty and biodiversity combine to make the park a very special place.

Left: Biologist Tim Killeen of Conservation International.

Above: In the village of La Florida.

ity to accommodate visitors is the principal goal of the project, it is only half of the equation. La Florida, historically, has seen sparse tourism, due to its remote location and the fact that neither the national park nor Bolivia are on most travellers' radar screens. Although a steady trickle of scientists and nature lovers do visit Noel Kempff Mercado, most of them fly directly into the park, which means the closest La Florida residents get to them is when watching their charter planes pass overhead. The ecotourism project consequently has a strong marketing component. The Fundación has produced posters, brochures, a video and a CD-Rom—in English and Spanish—to promote Noel Kempff Mercado and La Florida to travellers.

"We've identified viable markets," says Mr. Killeen, adding that the Fundación is targeting low-budget travellers, who have traditionally ignored the park. The SGP grant included funds for two marketing trips to the Peruvian city of Cuzco, a mecca for the millions of backpackers who travel through South America every year. Mr. Killeen maintains that if they succeed in luring a mere fraction of the tourists who visit Cuzco, this will transform La Florida's subsistence economy. The Fundación is also organizing holiday excursions for Bolivian university and high school students, as part of a plan to attract domestic tourism.

"The people of La Florida can't provide first class service. So we're hooking them up with markets that don't want first class service," says Mr. Killeen. "It's a perfect fit."

Building more inclusive communities

While it is still too early to measure the success of the project's marketing efforts, global trends bode well for La Florida, its organizers believe. International tourism is expected to double in the next 20 years, and ecotourism is regarded as one of the industry's fastest growing sectors. The UN's designation of 2002 as the International Year of Ecotourism is expected to increase that momentum.

Ruben Salas, the SGP's National Coordinator in Bolivia, says the Programme has funded eight ecotourism projects, to date. Although these may seem slow to produce results, he says he believes that tourism is a viable development option for communities located near natural attractions, of which Bolivia has a great variety.

La Florida's elected chief, 38-year-old Pastor Solís, has been involved in the project from the outset, participating in the guide training and ecotourism association. Like many La Florida residents, his experience in the park stretches back to before its creation, when he worked for a large logging company. Since then he has been a research assistant and, more recently, a guide. He expresses confidence that nature tourism will play an increasingly important role in the local economy. "Tourism will benefit the entire community," he insists. "Not just a few people, but everyone."

Carlos Felipe Martinez, UNDP Resident Representative in Bolivia, shares this enthusiasm for a project that he says reflects UNDP's mission of promoting sustainable human development. In his words: "I'm certain that when communities are given the opportunity and responsibility to work together for the environment, and promote tourism as a source of income, we are advancing toward liberty, toward equity, and social justice." ■

David Dudenhoefer is a US-based environmental writer and author of travel guides to Latin America.

Left and below right: little-known treasure: Noel Kempff Mercado's vast expanses are starting to become better known.

Left and above: Income from eco-tourism has been a boon.

VIEWPOINT

The European Union Action Plan for a Greener Future

BY MARGOT WALLSTRÖM

A clean and healthy environment is part and parcel of the prosperity and quality of life that we desire for ourselves now and for our children in the future. This presents challenges and opportunities. The environment is a precious resource that needs to be protected. In the European Union (EU), 30 years of environmental policy have led to a comprehensive system of controls—but more action remains necessary. In order to meet environmental challenges the European Commission (EC) has established a set of priorities.

The EU's Sixth Environment Action Programme (6EAP) agreed upon in Strasbourg on 13 March 2002, spells out our desire for an action-oriented approach towards environmental policy-making. This 10-year programme establishes priorities for a EU response focusing on four main policy areas: climate change, nature and biodiversity, environment and health, and natural resources and waste. The 6EAP marks an important step in addressing the key environmental objectives and priorities whilst providing a legal foundation on which to build. The new programme stresses, among other things, the importance of more effective implementation of existing environmental legislation by Member States as well as integrating the environment into all community policies to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.

The EU agreed in Göteborg, in June 2001, on a Strategy for Sustainable Development based on the principle that the economic, social and environmental effects of all policies should be examined in a coordinated way and taken into account in decision making. This is a long-term strategy, which calls for action at all levels of society and government, since each member of society has an important role to play in the future of the planet. To achieve these ambitious but essential objectives, I believe in the importance of involving citizens, including consumers, parents, teachers and children.

The Aarhus Convention is an encouraging step through which, by linking environmental rights with human rights, we can increase access to information and justice in environmental matters through public participation in decision making. However, increased access to information needs to go hand in hand with increased awareness and changes in consumer behaviour, which is a prerequisite for change. This raises the difficult question: "How to get people involved?" We must find a way to increase citizens' participation and awareness. One way would be to emphasize the causal link between environment degradation and threats to human health, particularly to the most vulnerable groups in society such as children. The threats posed by dangerous chemicals could be highlighted, for example, as could the importance of finding alternative technologies to reduce risks to man and the environment.

How to get people involved is a difficult question.

The upcoming World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg is an opportunity for us to rise to the challenge of sustainable globalization. The EC recently outlined its platform for Johannesburg in the communication "Towards a Global Partnership for Sustainable Development," which defines the EU's priorities and actions. The EU agenda is very broad and will cover poverty reduction and development financing as well as matters relating to governance and the sound management of natural resources. I will focus here on the "environmental agenda."

Climate change is the most serious environmental problem and has a profound social and economic impact. Poor countries are the most vulnerable in this respect. The increasing demand for energy, particularly for the two billion people for whom wood and coal are the principal sources of energy, represents a major challenge.

Other global challenges are posed by problems concerning water. These include the lack of water and increasing water consumption, insufficient access to drinking water, poor sanitation (50 percent of the world's population are without sanitation), and pollution of rivers, lakes and groundwater.

Desertification and the deterioration of the soil, deforestation and its impact on biodiversity, the increasing number of natural disasters, the impact of overfishing and maritime pollution, and exposure to dangerous chemicals are all global phenomena which call for concerted action.

To face these global challenges, it is crucial that the multilateral agreements on the environment be applied effectively, beginning with the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol. The Global Environmental Facility must be rebuilt, its funds increased by 50 percent and its mandate extended. A number of sectoral initiatives covering, among other areas, water, energy, forestry, transport, fishing and disaster prevention, should also be adopted in the run-up to the Johannesburg Summit.

The EC believes in the future of the environment and the need to work together as a global community to ensure its safety and stability for coming generations. ■

Margot Wallström is Commissioner for the Environment of the European Commission.

TAKING ACTION FOR EARTH'S FUTURE

VOICES ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Challenge of the Century: Sustainable Development for All

With the scene being set for the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg, South Africa, CHOICES asked experts on global environment and energy issues what they see as the biggest sustainable human development challenges facing our planet, and what their hopes are for the Summit.

Geoffrey Lean

It's a tricky question, and there are lots of possible answers. There is no bigger challenge than the toll taken by poverty. Over two million children die each year from diarrhoea because they do not have safe water to drink. About two and a half million people, mainly women and children, perish from breathing smoke from burning wood, dung or crop wastes because they can't get cleaner fuels. As Indira Gandhi told the UN Conference on Human Environment in Stockholm 30 years ago, poverty is indeed "the worst form of pollution."

But what about the degradation of natural resources that deepens poverty and eventually threatens the world economy? The 24 billion tonnes of topsoil lost each year? The deforestation which causes such erosion, dries up water supplies and produces floods? The overfishing that denudes the seas? Or the rapid loss of species that threatens the greatest mass extinction since the death of the dinosaurs? No society can long withstand such undermining of the natural foundations on which it is built.

Yet global warming poses an even greater challenge. Apart from anything else, it makes all the other problems worse. As the climate changes, droughts and floods will increase, deserts grow and seas rise. Forests will die out, species perish as their habitats change. Water will become even scarcer for most of the world's poorest people. And almost everywhere it is the poorest who will be hit hardest.

It also has a unique potential to cause abrupt catastrophic change. The US National Academy of Sciences has recently joined those who warn that global warming could make the world's climate flip, within the space of just a few years, to a much more hostile one, ending the 11,000 years of benign weather which has allowed the growth of human civilization. And even lesser changes are effectively irreversible; once the seas start rising, the leading scientists warn, they cannot be brought down again in less than millennia.

Combating it is also particularly challenging because of the inertia built into the world's system; action taken now will not start slowing the climate change for decades. It is already too late to stop some degree of warming; the goal must be to moderate it enough to keep it within tolerable limits, while adapting to a warmer world. The world is making a start with the Kyoto Protocol. Governments, particularly in developed countries, must give stronger signals that they will clamp down on emissions of greenhouse gases, so as to give industry the incentive to produce the cleaner technologies that will bring real change. Ultimately, the only equitable solution is one that allows each person on Earth the same quota of the pollution.

Global warming will not be solved this decade, but a determined change of direction has to be made over the next 10 years if it is to be managed at all. But that means overcoming the inertia of human, as well as of natural, systems. And, come to think of it, that is the biggest challenge of all. ■

Geoffrey Lean, environment editor of London's The Independent on Sunday, *is a member of the Board of Advisers for CHOICES Magazine.*

Yolanda Kakabadse

Making environmental concerns central to sustainable development in all sectors is a huge challenge; success in meeting it depends on communication and cooperation across broad sectors of society. Consider just one natural resource: water. More than one billion people around the world lack access to potable water. Meanwhile, many freshwater aquatic species around the world face extinction while freshwater ecosystems are being caught in a downward spiral of degradation and destruction.

Water resources management is usually oriented towards maximizing water availability for irrigation, hydropower or drinking. This has led to the construction of dams in most of the world's river systems without considering the effects on

Photo: IUCN

ecosystems and ways of life of those who are their direct beneficiaries. This is an issue of vital importance to poor communities that suffer most from tradeoffs between other users.

When addressing such issues, we should seek optimum options for all through fair and open processes that are socially inclusive. In Mauritania, for example, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) has worked with the government there to counter destructive consequences of a dam on the lower Senegal River, whose delta once supported an economy of fishing, pastoralism and production of basic building materials. When the dam was built, flooding of the delta ceased; with that came the decline of an abundant biodiversity on which the local economy had been based. This collapse led to an exodus of men to go work in towns, leaving behind impoverished women and children. Meanwhile, upstream land owners reaped the benefits from irrigated lands, and the country gained an export commodity, rice. But the management of irrigation channels encouraged invasive plant species that provided a breeding ground for mosquitoes, with a consequent rise in diseases, especially among children.

IUCN and other development partners worked to restore the floodplain by introducing artificial floods, after consultation with local communities, who agreed to them provided these were timed to meet essential needs.

While some successes can be shown in Mauritania, it is preferable that by thinking about the ecosystem and the benefits people derive from it up front, we can move more surely on a path to sustainable development. Looking globally, there are encouraging signs of a growing recognition that all sectors must work together to inform policy debates on water issues. The Second World Water Forum and the World Commission on Dams have shown the willingness of divergent and sometimes opposing parties from different sectors to debate options that can bring them together. The emergence of new arrangements like the Global Water Partnership and the Dialogue on Water, Food and Environment, is important for taking water resources management beyond sectoral approaches. This collaboration and integration is much needed considering the challenges we face.

For a comprehensive and integrated approach, partnerships need to be forged at all levels, from local to international, and between governments and civil society. ■

Yolanda Kakabadse is President of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources.

Jonathan Lash

Of all the energy-related problems affecting the environment, transport has so far proven the most intractable. While it is the key conduit of economic and social benefits, transport is also the source of major environmental problems.

Transport is the main source of air pollution in Latin America. In Asia, it is close to overtaking that of industry and households. It has become one of the single most important drivers of global climate change. Not only has it become a serious cause of public health problems in the developing wor' , but it has pushed walking, cycling, and even rickshaws to where they have become unsafe. As megacities like Calcutta, Lagos, Mexico City, Mumbai, São Paulo and Shanghai grow, the transport gridlock will worsen.

By 2025, about five out of every eight people in the world will be living in cities. In the developing world, many will live in 14 megacities with populations in excess of 10 million. In these cities, the demand for transport will outstrip the supply of subways, buses and roads. It took only 20 years for car and motorcycle ownership to reach the same level it took North America 50 years to reach.

Photo: WRI

Through a new institution called EMBARQ—the World Resources Institute Centre for Sustainable Transport—we hope to unsnarl this traffic gridlock. Established in Mexico City in March 2002 with the support of Shell Foundation, the centre will work for a future where modern, healthy, and environmentally sustainable transport is available to everyone. We will work in five key cities in the developing world, starting with Mexico, where transport-related environmental and social problems are most pressing. EMBARQ will work closely with city governments, political leaders, local research institutions, and non-governmental organizations to spark solutions to transport problems.

EMBARQ will rely on sound science to make the case for the most cost-effective and most environmentally sustainable solutions to transport problems. It will provide the information that city planners, government officials, bus operators, taxi companies, and energy suppliers need to enable them to write and implement their own sustainable transport policies. The centre will promote solutions based on real knowledge of how, when and why people travel, how far they go, how long it takes, and what they are prepared to do and pay to make things better.

EMBARQ will also monitor developments in fuels, vehicles, and technologies in rich countries. Many of the transport technologies being used in the developing world today are not as advanced as in the countries where they were developed. It is clear that current transport systems cannot carry commuters into the future. We urgently need solutions and hopefully EMBARQ can spark them. ■

Jonathan Lash is President of the World Resources Institute in Washington, DC.

Björn Stigson

The numbers of poor, and the numbers of ways in which many are poor, represent one of the great failures of our civilization. Poverty in all its forms is a major challenge to sustainable development. It will be a key agenda item in Johannesburg.

Globalization and an equitable market system may offer the best hope for reversing this trend and addressing these unmet needs, but the market must become more inclusive and benefit all. In our earlier work on *Sustainability through the Market*, one key question was how to extend markets to serve the needs of the poor around the world. 'Making markets work for all' appeared like a necessary condition to ensuring sustainable development in the developing world.

We believe that business, as part of its role to generate wealth and employment, can also deliver products and services, which truly promote sustainable livelihoods for the poor. This is the rationale for a new

initiative we are undertaking to examine the links between business and sustainable livelihoods, and determine what is the business case for promoting such livelihoods.

Part of the motivation is enlightened self-interest: the realization that it is impossible to do business in a failing society. But companies are also starting to see that meeting the unmet needs of the world's poor can represent new business opportunities. With many markets in the industrialized North nearing saturation, business is turning to the South for new customers.

In recent years, the limitations of both welfare and international aid in helping the poor improve their lives have become increasingly apparent. Foreign direct investment (FDI) has superseded official direct assistance with a four-fold increase in 10 years. But we believe that there are substantial potential synergies in more interaction between official development assistance (ODA) and foreign direct investment flows.

A key challenge in enabling ODA and FDI to reach a broader set of recipient countries is to improve government framework conditions there. Some of the chief barriers to private sector activity in such countries are uncertainty regarding their political situations and the rule of law, as well as corruption, inadequate institutions and weak infrastructure.

To be sustainable, solutions to poverty must be based on new levels of environmental efficiency. With most population growth taking place in the least developed countries, pressures on the environment look set to intensify. The challenge is therefore for poorer nations to raise their standards of living while environmental thresholds are respected.

Business can contribute solutions to fighting poverty, but it cannot be expected to do it in isolation. Creating sustainable livelihoods for the poor is clearly an area for shared responsibility and action between business, governments and civil society. ■

Björn Stigson is President of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development.

Maurice Strong

The great hope for the WSSD in Johannesburg is that it will reignite political will and public interest, as the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro did 10 years ago. It is largely as a result of the Rio summit that there has been real progress on some fronts, along with real disappointments on others.

The conventions which were put in place in Rio in framework form have provided the basis for continuing negotiation and major progress on issues like climate change, biodiversity and desertification. On the other hand, absent from the Kyoto Protocol is the one country that is the biggest single source of atmospheric emissions. This demonstrates the tough resistance to fundamental change.

On the positive side, virtually all business today takes the issue of sustainable development seriously, and an increasing number are making corporate commitments to environmental responsibility. Around the world, more than 3,000 cities and major towns have adopted local Agenda 21 programmes, based on the global agreement, and are implementing them to various degrees. There has also been a tremendous increase in environmental awareness and education in schools around the world.

Still, the fundamental degradation of our primary ecological systems has continued and the forces behind this have persisted. It is my fundamental belief that we must live up to the commitment called for at Rio if we are going to move through this new century with a civilization that is secure and sustainable, environmentally. This is the decisive time in our history. And I believe that the direction will be set in the first three decades of this century. That does not mean that everything will be in ruins or all will be solved in three decades. But every year that we fail to make the transition to a sustainable development path makes it less possible and more costly to do so.

Photo: Maureen Lynch/INDP

More and more ecosystems that we rely on are deteriorating. The effects of air and water pollution are particularly severe in developing countries whose cities are among the most unhealthy and environmentally degraded in the world. The costs of such consequences are becoming very much more evident. So too with the deterioration of climate systems. We are witnessing the acceleration of climate-related events, with natural disasters, storms, floods and drought on a scale that is clearly beyond statistical norms.

Our biggest challenge in this new century is to take an idea that seems abstract—sustainable development—and turn it into a daily reality for all the world's people.

UN SECRETARY-GENERAL KOFI ANNAN

As this continues, it will command attention. For 10 years after Rio we see that any progress we have made has really not moved us firmly onto a trajectory to a sustainable future. Political will is lagging—not because there is no underlying support by governments, but because their attention is pre-empted by the more immediate problems, like terrorism.

My hope and expectation for Johannesburg is that the Summit will indeed produce the political momentum now lacking. Because if it does not, one wonders where the impetus will come from. ■

Maurice Strong, who chaired the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, is Chairman of the Earth Council.

VIEWPOINT

Biotechnology and the Environment: Rethinking Public Policy

BY SAKIKO FUKUDA-PARR

More than half of the world's poorest people depend on agriculture for their existence, many of them living in environments where crop failures are frequent due to drought and other natural catastrophes. They have little alternative but to continue to rely on farming, fishing and keeping livestock. Increasing productivity is the key to securing their livelihoods.

The new tools of biotechnology offer the potential for creating crop varieties that meet the farming challenges that the poor face, such as ones that are more tolerant of drought or saline soils. Relatively little has been done to explore this potential so far, and genetically modified (GM) crop development has been concentrated in industrialized countries, focusing on crops and characteristics of little relevance to farmers in the developing world. Meanwhile, recognizing the potential of GM crops for such countries does not imply rejecting the potential and importance of other forms of agricultural progress, notably those based on organic or other systems of sustainable agriculture and indigenous knowledge.

Many opponents of GM crops are rightly concerned with two kinds of risk that this technology can carry: their potential health and environmental effects, and their potentially negative social and economic consequences. Both need serious attention, as indeed such risks do when it comes to introducing any new technology.

But the debate has become polarized, dominated by extreme positions. A "third way" needs to be pursued, one that can truly capture scientific potential for tackling global poverty and hunger.

According to strong opponents of GM crops, they are dangerous and should be banned until proven safe, and corporate control of biotechnology seems destined to destroy farmers' livelihoods. Another argument put forward is that there is enough food in the world already and solutions lie in better redistribution, not technological fixes. Biotechnology's champions, on the other hand, contend that GM foods are no less safe than the organic variety. They say that it is global agribusiness that will create the new foods needed to stop hunger in the developing world.

The third way has the goal of promoting food security, not genetically modified organisms (GMOs) (www.undp.org/hdr2001), as such. In the interests of that goal, policies that promote pro-technology, pro-poor and pro-public sector involvement need to incorporate strategies for tackling safety and corporate control issues.

When it comes to safety, case-by-case assessments are required; risks vary by crop, plant characteristic, eco-system and capacity to deal with challenges. More internationally and publicly funded research into potential long-term harm is required. The risks of change must be balanced against those arising out of inertia, such as hunger and chemical pollution. There is a strong need to build the capacity of people in developing countries to address risk management issues. That means enabling local communities to make choices that they believe are right for them.

A "third way" needs to be pursued, one that can truly capture scientific potential for tackling global poverty and hunger.

When it comes to issues of corporate control, the private sector alone will not be able to use GM techniques to achieve food security. Public investment and incentive mechanisms to redirect the agenda are essential. One goal is to ensure that false claims about GM agriculture are countered and refuted. Another is that indigenous knowledge in developing countries be safeguarded. Moreover, public-private partnerships can be valuable in bringing together diverse skills and establishing mechanisms for access to intellectual property rights.

When it comes to feeding the world, food security and poverty reduction cannot be solved by redistribution alone. The aim should be to increase the entitlements of the poorest by raising their productivity. Far more public sector funding is needed to research GM techniques for poor farmers' crops.

Fostering local and national capacity within developing country institutions, and among scientists, administrators and industry specialists is essential. Such research needs to be based in the South, through regional networks that are centres of excellence. The third way depends on public leadership and policies that can mobilize partnerships involving private sector players with technological know-how and patents.

Technology can be a tool for human development; the role of good public policy is to shape the course of its progress to make it happen. If—nationally and globally—public policies have so far fallen short of this objective in relation to GM technology, then that is a compelling reason for rethinking and reform, but not for condemnation of the technology itself. ■

Sakiko Fukuda-Parr is Director of UNDP's Human Development Report Office.

Photo: Robert Mann/UNDP

UNDP GOODWILL AMBASSADOR

Water and Globalization

Water is significant to democratic development. Managing water has been a basis of democracy in the past of many countries.

"Here lies one whose name was writ in water."

—John Keats's epitaph, written by himself.

Here we have our world, whose life is writ in water. About 1.123 billion (18.5 percent) of the people on our planet are without safe water. Between 1990 and 2000 their numbers in Africa increased from 293 million to 309 million, in Latin America increased from 86 million to 92 million, in Asia decreased only from 800 million to 695 million—not quite as disappointing as it appears, since populations rose significantly, mounting the number to be served. Across the regions, those with access to safe water grew from 3.06 billion to 3.89 billion. But the conclusion is that, in the decade, the number of people served barely kept pace with population increase; the number without water fell by less than 10 percent. It is in urban areas that access is in danger of falling further behind; wars—waged, declared and undeclared—political, racial and religious conflicts send those who flee them wandering, proliferating outer cities of shelter without resources.

The world target set by the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development in 2000 was to halve the number of the world's people without water by 2015, even with population increases. I place my priority in water as development within this context, from the perspective of my country, South Africa. In 1994, 12 million South Africans (population 45 million) were without access to safe water. In 2002, well over six million are already provided with this, and by end of this year it is assured, in proven practice, that less than half the original number will be left to serve. The basic supply—free—is 25 litres per person per day at access not farther than 200 metres away. The process is established to fulfill the aim of bringing water to everyone in South Africa by 2008. The rest of the water-problematical world hasn't seen comparable progress.

Despite the rise in urban need, the rural one is paramount in many countries. Provision of water safe to drink, to cook with and wash involves many factors beyond a tap and pipes from some source. The project has to have funds for reticulation or other transport, purification, distribution. In rural South Africa the neglect of past regimes has left women still walking considerable distances to fetch a bucket of water. Access: the poorest have none because they have no money in their community. If a structure provides clean water to be paid for (installment and maintenance are costly) it is seen that people will continue to fetch theirs from polluted rivers that carry cholera. Various ways are tried to monitor basic free water; a card for a fixed amount to be inserted at the conveniently-installed source is one.

Water: as the best means of sanitation it's unachievable in many areas. Yet water and hygiene are inextricably connected. Pit toilets answer the need to dispose of human waste. But whether at a homestead or communally used, if they are placed near streams or rivers, seepage occurs, and pollution of sources of water drawn on for purification defeats a water project. And there's the essential, simple practice many provided with toilets have to be taught: water must be used to wash hands.

Photo: Peter Magubane/UNDP

Despite a concerted government effort since the apartheid era ended, most black households in South Africa still lack running water.

Water is significant to democratic development. Managing water has been a basis of democracy in the past of many countries (e.g., Netherlands and the United Kingdom). This implies the responsibility of local democracy: since affordability versus poverty is one of the barriers to water access, cooperation of the community with the government is absolutely essential: organization to manage the resource collectively and in accordance with how local people know their needs. The issue may be as small as the provision of diesel oil to keep a village pump going; or it may be a factor in wider necessity to provide electricity to the community.

South Africa is fortunate in that we have a rich strata to support the distribution of basic free water. Other countries—for example, our neighbour Mozambique—cannot afford to do so. A challenge to the Summit is how to provide the water of life in the poorest countries, surely a primary aspect of meaningful globalization.

Water. Think of it as you turn up your face under the shower. ■

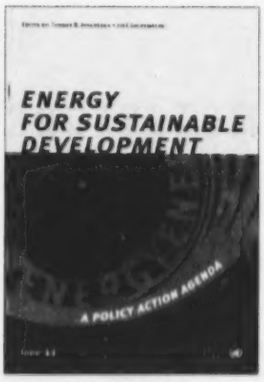
Nadine Gordimer, winner of the 1991 Nobel Prize for Literature, has been a UNDP Goodwill Ambassador since 1998.

NOTEBOOK

New UNDP Publication on Sustainable Energy Policy

Energy for Sustainable Development: A Policy Action Agenda, a new publication, discusses critical policies in energy and other sectors necessary to address multiple development objectives, including economic growth, equity and environmental protection. The publication, produced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), was released in time for the fourth preparatory committee meeting of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Bali, Indonesia (27 May-7 June 2002).

Modern forms of energy empower human beings in countless ways: by reducing drudgery, increasing productivity, transforming food, providing illumination, transporting water, fuelling transportation, powering industrial and agricultural processes, cooling or heating rooms, and facilitating electronic communications and computer operations, among others. While it is imperative to find ways to greatly expand energy services, especially to the two billion people who rely on traditional fuels such as wood and dung, and those who lack access to electricity, this expansion must be achieved in ways that are affordable, environmentally sound, safe, convenient, reliable and equitable.



Energy for Sustainable Development:
A Policy Action Agenda

Thomas B. Johansson and Jose Goldemberg eds.
150 pages, English
ISBN 92-1-126145-7
Published by UNDP

To obtain a copy, contact Susan McDade, tel 212 906 6085, fax 212 906 5148 or susan.mcdade@undp.org. To download the report: www.undp.org/seed/eap.

The purpose of the publication is to follow-up on the *World Energy Assessment: Energy and the Challenge of Sustainability*, published in 2000 and to offer informed guidance on how to shape public policy so that it accelerates the growth of energy systems that support sustainable development. The World Energy Assessment, a collaborative body of work by UNDP, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the World Energy Council, concluded that accomplishing sustainable development in this century is possible but only if there are major changes in energy systems and policies. The recently-released UNDP publication describes how policy makers are struggling to understand how to intervene most effectively to stimulate technological innovation, attract private investment, and refocus regulation to advance the economic, social, and environmental objectives of sustainability. Regrettably, there are no simple blueprints that will work in all situations.

Energy and development experts from nine countries contributed to Energy for Sustainable Development, which contains six chapters dealing with the role of energy in sustainable development, making markets and government work better, sustainable electricity policy, energy technologies and policies for rural development, the innovation chain and capacity development. Case studies throughout the volume provide concrete examples of what has succeeded, what has failed, and why. ■

By Susan McDade, Energy Programme Team Manager, UNDP's Bureau for Development Policy.

Equator Initiative Honours Success Stories

Is part of your country between the tropic of Capricorn or tropic of Cancer? Do you know of excellent local initiatives there that are reducing poverty through the conservation and wise use of biodiversity?

If so, you ought to know about the Equator Initiative—an innovative new programme to showcase highly successful partnerships in sustainable development and sharing of "best practices" from around the world.

In support of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg from 26 August to 4 September 2002, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) earlier this year teamed up with the Government of Canada, the International Development Research Centre, Television Trust for the Environment and the United Nations Foundation in a unique effort to help communities in the tropics learn from one another by sharing their knowledge and experience.

The initial result of this joint venture is that five outstanding community-based projects are to be honoured in Johannesburg for their record of having reduced poverty through conservation and the sustainable use of biodiversity in the tropical belt (between latitudes 23.5 degrees north and south of the Equator.) The winners of the US$30,000 cash awards, nominated at large from around the world, will be ones that are deemed to be models of how to enhance South-South exchanges of experiences among tropical communities, non-governmental organizations, the private sector and governments.

People living within the equatorial belt face a host of economic and environmental challenges that differ from those of communities in temperate areas. The poor in the tropics, for example, tend to be far more dependent on indigenous plant and animal resources for their food, medicines, shelter and income generation than do people elsewhere—and also more vulnerable to biodiversity losses.

Communities that have faced challenges arising out of such conditions, and overcome them through the sustainable use and management of biological resources, will be awarded for "best practices" in five fields. These are: non-timber forestry products; sustainable fishing, aquaculture or use of marine products; use of protected areas to establish opportunities for sustainable livelihoods; agro-biodiversity and sustainable tropical agriculture; medicines and pharmaceuticals. A special honorary prize will be given to recognize a major corporate achievement in supporting sustainable development in the tropics.

In addition to the awards, the Equator Initiative will work to foster country-to-country exchanges of knowledge about successful approaches and technologies, through a further programme of "best practice exchange grants." By the end of 2003 each of the five winners in Johannesburg will have hosted a local knowledge exchange workshop with community representatives from five other tropical countries.

In other words, communities in 25 more countries will have benefited from the five Equator Initiative grant awards announced at the Summit.

For more information, go to: www.EquatorInitiative.org or contact sean.southey@undp.org. ■

By Yasmin Padamsee, a communications consultant in UNDP New York.

East Timor Celebrates Independence Day

DILI, EAST TIMOR

The new Constitution sitting amid piles of papers on the desks of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) here does not look like much: it consists of 30 pages of typed paper, stapled at one corner. Yet despite its humble appearance it is a symbol of liberty, freedom and human rights for hundreds of thousands of people in East Timor who celebrated its nationhood on 20 May 2002 with the inauguration of Jose Alexandre "Xanana" Gusmao as the country's first president.

East Timor's independence did not come easy: it was a long and painful struggle, with much loss of life. The UN system, including UNDP and the UN Volunteers, helped a proud people conduct their own democratic elections. Therefore, it seemed fitting for UNDP to help produce the country's first-ever Constitution to mark this historic milestone and to make sure that every citizen of the world's newest democracy has access to the document.

Photo: Jean-Baptiste Arnal/UNDP

Birth of a nation, 1999. In UN-sponsored 1999 plebiscite East Timorese vote overwhelmingly for independence.

Some 60,000 copies of a special pocket-sized version were printed. Although not the "official" document, it was an attempt to help citizens understand the intricacies and legal complexities of the Constitution. It was produced in the national languages of Tetum—the most widely spoken one in East Timor—and Portuguese, as well as *Bahasa*, the national language of Indonesia, still widely read and spoken here. A Timorese designer and graphics team worked on the design, typesetting and layout of the pocket Constitution, making it a truly national-owned project.

It is UNDP's hope that long after the celebrations are over, this little book will still remain on shelves in libraries, in homes, and indeed, in peoples' pockets, as a permanent reminder of East Timor's cherished independence. ■

By Imogen Wall, a communications officer in UNDP East Timor.

COMING IN JULY

Human Development Report

2002

THE 13TH IN THE ANNUAL SERIES, THIS YEAR'S HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT (HDR) IS ON THE THEME

Deepening Democracy in a Fragmented World

Commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and written by a team of leading independent scholars, economists and development practitioners, HDR 2002 is about why democratic governance matters for human development. It emphasizes the importance of political freedoms as a goal of human development and explores how democratic institutions help promote economic and social progress. It examines power, politics and human development and presents the imperatives for continual strengthening of democratic capacity within and across governments, institutions, and communities—rich and poor. A country-by-country rating on progress toward achievement of the Millennium Development Goals is an added feature of this year's Report to be launched on 24 July in the Philippines. The Report is translated into a dozen languages and launched in more than 100 countries annually. It is available from Oxford University Press, on the Web at www.oup-usa.org/reports/un or by telephone at (800) 451-7556. Price: US$22.95.

MATTERS OF FACT

Photo: Sid Kane/UNDP

Galapagos Islands, Ecuador.

World fossil fuel consumption (coal, oil and natural gas) rose from the equivalent of 1,666 million tons of oil a year in 1950 to 7,643 millions tons in 2000—about 460%. • Over 27% of the world's coral reefs are now severely damaged, up from 10% at the time of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. • In 2000, 1.1 billion people were not able to meet their needs for safe water, including 693 million in Asia, 300 million in Africa, and 78 million in Latin America and the Caribbean. • More than 25% of the world's 4,630 mammal species and 11% of the 9,675 bird species are at significant risk of extinction. • Poor environmental quality contributes to 25% of all preventable diseases in the world. • The wealthiest 20% of the world's population consumes 68% of its commercial energy; the poorest 20% uses less than 2%. • Mexico City has sunk more than 10 metres over the past 70 years because of excessive withdrawal of water from groundwater sources. • Over 75% of carbon emissions from fossil fuel burning and industrial wood consumption occurs in urban areas. • Three-quarters of the world's commercial energy is consumed in cities. • The average citizen in the United States consumes about 10 times as much energy as a typical person in China and 20 times more than a resident of India.

Sources: Worldwatch Vital Signs 2001; Worldwatch State of the World 2002; World Health Organization and UNICEF, Global Water Supply and Sanitation Assessment 2000 Report; UN brochure for the World Summit on Sustainable Development; Cities in a Globalizing World: Global Report on Human Settlements 2000—UN Centre for Human Settlements.

undp Partnerships to Fight Poverty

United Nations Development Programme
One United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017